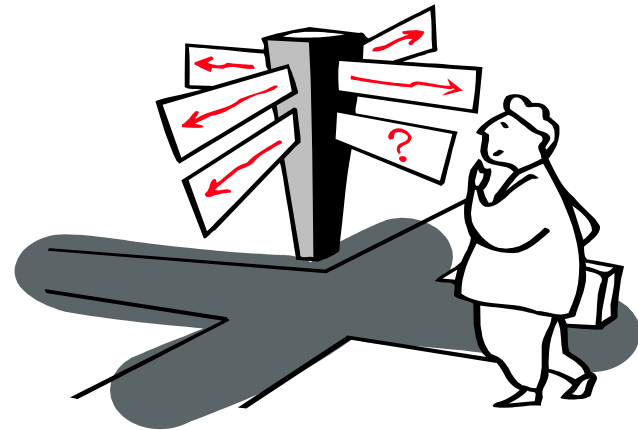


Your Guide To Vocational Rehabilitation



LOUISIANA REHABILITATION SERVICES (LRS)

Non-Discrimination

LRS provides services without regard to race, creed, color, sex, age, national origin, or disability.

January 2005

LOUISIANA REHABILITATION SERVICES (LRS)

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION (VR)

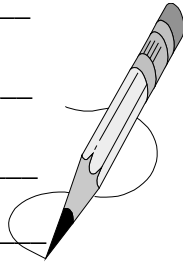
The purpose of this booklet is to help explain vocational rehabilitation – how it works and how you can make it work for you. Keep this booklet handy so you can refer to it at any time. Your vocational rehabilitation counselor will explain vocational rehabilitation services and answer any questions you and your family members may have.

Counselor's Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone No.: _____

Fax No.: _____



Mission Statement

To assist persons with disabilities in their desire to obtain or maintain employment and/or to achieve independence in their community by providing rehabilitation services and by working cooperatively with business and other community services.

Philosophy Statement

To fulfill the mission of LRS by increasing public awareness and by using existing resources and developing innovative strategies to identify and meet the needs of persons with disabilities; and to provide individualized, flexible and timely services consistent with informed choice.

NOTES:

[illegible]

[illegible]

Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) is a program of services that helps persons with disabilities obtain the skills and other resources they need to get a job, keep a job, and develop a lifetime career.

You should apply if you have a disability and your disability causes you problems in preparing for, finding, or keeping employment.

When you apply for VR Services, a vocational rehabilitation counselor is assigned to work with you. Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors are trained to work with persons who have disabilities and are one of the most important people in your vocational rehabilitation program.

- ☞ Be open and honest about your disability, your needs, and your feelings.
- ☞ Ask questions if you do not understand something.
- ☞ Follow medical or other professional instructions.
- ☞ Inform your counselor of any changes in your situation.
- ☞ Keep all appointments and be on time. Call your counselor if you cannot keep an appointment.

BASIC STEPS TO VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Referral & Application

Initial Interview

Evaluation/Assessment

Eligibility

Planning

Services

Employment

Successful Rehabilitation

STEP 1 – REFERRAL & APPLICATION

To apply for VR services, contact the LRS office nearest to where you live. A list of offices is printed in the back of this booklet. You should be prepared to give the following information:

- | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|
| ❖ Name | ❖ Address |
| ❖ Disability | ❖ Date of Birth |
| ❖ Telephone Number | ❖ Social Security Number |

A Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor will then contact you either by phone or in writing to schedule an initial interview. Prior to your interview, you should notify your counselor of any special accommodations you may need. Appointments are usually made within 30 days of receiving your request for services.

PARISHES SERVED BY EACH REGIONAL OFFICE

NEW ORLEANS – REGION 1

| | |
|-------------|-------------|
| Jefferson | St. Charles |
| Orleans | St. James |
| Plaquemine | St. John |
| St. Bernard | St. Tammany |

LAKE CHARLES – REGION 5

Allen
Beauregard
Calcasieu
Cameron
Jefferson Davis

BATON ROUGE – REGION 2

Ascension
East Baton Rouge
East Feliciana
Iberville
Livingston
Pointe Coupee
St. Helena
Tangipahoa
Washington
West Baton Rouge
West Feliciana

ALEXANDRIA – REGION 6

Avoyelles
Catahoula
Concordia
Grant
LaSalle
Rapides
Vernon
Winn

HOUMA – REGION 3

Assumption
Lafourche
Terrebonne

SHREVEPORT – REGION 7

| | |
|-----------|--------------|
| Bienville | Lincoln |
| Bossier | Natchitoches |
| Caddo | Red River |
| Claiborne | Sabine |
| DeSoto | Webster |

LAFAYETTE – REGION 4

| | |
|------------|------------|
| Acadia | St. Landry |
| Evangeline | St. Martin |
| Iberia | St. Mary |
| Lafayette | Vermilion |

MONROE – REGION 8

| | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Caldwell | Ouachita |
| East Carroll | Richland |
| Franklin | Tensas |
| Jackson | Union |
| Madison | West Carroll |
| Morehouse | |

OFFICES AND LOCATIONS

If you have questions that were not answered, please be sure to contact your regional LRS office. All our office numbers are TDD equipped for persons who are deaf, hard of hearing, or speech impaired. Each office also has a Louisiana toll free number. Office hours are Monday through Friday — 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

REGION 1

New Orleans Regional Office
3500 Canal Street, 2nd Floor
New Orleans, LA 70119
(504) 483-4709 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2963 (In State)

REGION 5

Lake Charles Regional Office
3616 Kirkman Street
Lake Charles, LA 70607-3006
(337) 475-8038 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0589 (In State)

REGION 2

Baton Rouge Regional Office
3651 Cedarcrest Avenue
Baton Rouge, LA 70816
(225) 295-8900 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2959 (In State)

REGION 6

Alexandria Regional Office
900 Murray Street, Rm H– 100
Alexandria, LA 71309-0632
(318) 487-5335 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0578 (In State)

REGION 3

Houma Regional Office
1198 Barrow Street
Houma, LA 70360-5693
(985) 857-3652 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0584 (In State)

REGION 7

Shreveport Regional Office
1525 Fairfield Ave., Suite 708
Shreveport, LA 71101-4303
(318) 676-7155 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2966 (In State)

REGION 4

Lafayette Regional Office
Brandywine VI, Suite 350
825 Kaliste Saloom Road
Lafayette, LA 70508
(337) 262-5353 (V/TDD)
1-800-520-0587 (In State)

REGION 8

Monroe Regional Office
State Office Bldg., Room 311
122 St. John Street
Monroe, LA 71201
(318) 362-3232 (V/TDD)
1-800-737-2973 (In State)



STEP 2 – INITIAL INTERVIEW

During your initial interview, your VR counselor will review and/or complete your application for vocational rehabilitation services with you. Your counselor will ask you many questions about your disability, education, family, and work history to determine your eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services.

To speed up the eligibility process, bring the following with you to the Initial Interview:

- * Medical reports regarding your disability.
- * Transcripts and/or grades from high school, college/vocational technical school.
- * Reports from other professionals who have provided services to you.
- * A description or resume of your work history if you have work experience.

Sometimes additional medical exams are needed. Your VR counselor may arrange additional examinations for you, including a general physical/specialist evaluation, psychological, and/or a vocational evaluation. All evaluations—medical, psychological, and vocational—are provided at **no cost to you**.

You and your VR counselor may also discuss your career plans and possible VR services you may be eligible for that would help you reach your goal of employment.

PLEASE VISIT OUR WEBSITE AT: www.dss.state.la.us

STEP 3 – EVALUATION/ASSESSMENT

Your VR counselor uses the medical information to evaluate the effects of your disability on your ability to prepare for, get, and keep a job. A vocational evaluation consisting of a series of tests, activities, and interest inventories is used to learn more about your abilities, skills, interests, and the kinds of jobs that would be best suited for you.

All your medical and vocational information helps your VR counselor determine whether you qualify for VR services and what types of services you will need to reach your employment goal.

STEP 4 – ELIGIBILITY

Your VR counselor will determine if you are eligible for services. A decision should be reached within 60 days of the date of your application for VR services.

If a decision cannot be made within 60 days, your counselor will explain the reason(s). You will be provided with the option of:

- Allowing for an extension of time so that additional information may be gathered; or
- Choosing to have your counselor use the information you provided.

Eligibility for VR Services is made if:

- You have a physical, mental, learning, or emotional disability; **and**
- You have a problem getting or keeping a job because of your disability; **and**
- You need VR services to help you prepare for, get, and/or keep a job.

INDEPENDENT LIVING CENTERS

In addition to LRS' Independent Living Program, there are three Independent Living Centers located in Louisiana.

New Horizons, Inc.
9300 Mansfield Rd., Suite 204
Shreveport, LA 71118
Phone: (318) 688-6489
Fax: (318) 688-7823

Resources for Independent Living, Inc.
3616 So. I-10 Service Road, Suite 111
Metairie, LA 70001
Phone: (504) 522-1955
Fax: (504) 522-1954

Southwest Louisiana Independence Center, Inc
1202 Kirkman, Suite C
Lake Charles, LA 70601
Phone: (337) 477-7194
Fax: (337) 477-7198

Although services may vary among the Independent Living Centers, each offers:

- Information and referral services.
- Peer counseling.
- Independent living skills training.
- Advocacy.

INDEPENDENT LIVING SERVICES

Independent Living Services are provided to help persons with the most severe disabilities who are unable to work, live, and function independently within the family or community.

You may be eligible for Independent Living Services if:

- ☐ You have a severe physical or mental disability that limits your ability to function independently; and
- ☐ You will benefit from Independent Living services in terms of improving your ability to function, continue functioning, or move towards functioning independently within the family or the community.



If you are eligible, some of the services include:

- ☐ Counseling – to help you adjust to your disability.
- ☐ Personal Care Attendant – someone to assist you with your daily living needs.
- ☐ Home Modifications – a ramp, grab bars, etc.
- ☐ Rehabilitation Devices – prostheses, wheelchairs, lifts, etc.
- ☐ Interpreter and reader services.
- ☐ Other services that may help you live independently or become eligible for vocational rehabilitation services.



EXTENDED EVALUATION/TRIAL WORK PERIOD

When there is a question about your employability because of the severe nature of your disability, you are allowed an extended evaluation period. An extended evaluation period can last for 18 months. This allows your VR counselor time to determine if employment is a possibility for you. During the extended evaluation period, you and your VR counselor will decide which VR services you will need to help your counselor make an eligibility determination, including the use of Trial Work Period(s). At any time during the extended evaluation period, your counselor can make a decision to determine your eligibility or ineligibility for VR services.

SSI/SSDI RECIPIENTS

An individual who has a disability or who is blind as determined pursuant to Title II or Title XVI of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 401 et. seq. and 1381 et seq.) shall be:

1. considered to be an individual with either a significant disability or a most significant disability; such determination to be made by LRS; and
2. presumed to be eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, provided that the individual intends to achieve an employment outcome.

The VR counselor can find an SSDI or an SSI recipient ineligible for vocational rehabilitation services if the counselor can demonstrate by clear and convincing evidence through the use of trial work experiences that the severity of the individual's disability prohibits the individual from benefiting from vocational rehabilitation services in terms of an employment outcome.

LRS follows an “Order of Selection” for providing vocational rehabilitation services. This means eligible individuals with the most significant disabilities are given first priority for services.

If you are not eligible for VR services, your counselor will explain why and discuss other resources in the community that may help you.

STEP 5 – PLANNING

Once determined eligible for services, you and your VR counselor **work together** to plan and develop a vocational rehabilitation program designed just for **you!** Deciding on your vocational goal (career) and the VR services you need to reach this goal is the most important part of your VR program. You should be prepared to give a great deal of thought and planning into making this decision.



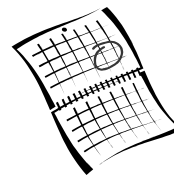
During the planning stage, you will be asked to provide documentation regarding your financial status. You will be required to provide verification of your income (W-2 forms or check stubs), assets, and checking and saving accounts. You will also need to provide verification of any disability related expenses you may have. Your VR counselor will complete a budget analysis.



Based on your income, you may be required to pay a portion of the cost of services.

In deciding your vocational goal, you have the option of choosing to develop your own plan or having your VR counselor help you develop your plan. This plan is called the **“Individualized Plan for Employment.”** It identifies your employment goal, time frames for services, and approved service providers necessary for your vocational rehabilitation. The plan also outlines your financial participation in services. This plan is also referred to as the **“IPE,” “RS-5,”** or as the **“plan.”** **This is an important document.**

Administrative Reviews are held and final decisions are given within **fifteen (15) calendar days** of receipt of your request. Most appeals are resolved by the Administrative Review. A Fair Hearing is a more formal process conducted by an Impartial Hearing Officer selected from a pool of approved hearing officers. The Impartial Hearing Officer hears both sides of the issue, weighs the facts of your case, and makes a decision based on federal and state laws and LRS policy. A Fair Hearing decision report is provided to you within **thirty (30) calendar days** of your hearing.



In a mediation session, both you and LRS will equally exchange information and offer solutions for an agreement, not the impartial mediator. If an agreement is reached, it is put in writing, both you and LRS sign, and the agreement becomes binding. You leave with the signed agreement at the end of the meeting. If no agreement is reached, you can still request a fair hearing.

At the Administrative Review, Fair Hearing, or Mediation Session (if applicable), you should:

- Clearly state your concerns and possible solutions.
- Have a clear idea of what you will and will not accept as a solution to your problem/request.
- Bring documentation that supports your position.
- If you choose, have a representative (family member, friend, attorney, or CAP) present.

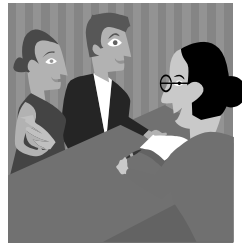
You should notify the Impartial Hearing Officer or Impartial Mediator in advance if you plan to have a representative or witness(es) at your Fair Hearing or Mediation Session.

APPEALS PROCESS

You should be very satisfied with the decisions or services you receive from LRS. However, sometimes a concern or problem may occur. If this happens, you should:

- ◆ Discuss the situation with your counselor or your counselor's supervisor; they may be willing to consider other possibilities and give valid reasons if alternatives are not appropriate. Most issues can be resolved at this level.
- ◆ If the problem cannot be resolved, ask for an **Administrative Review** (an informal meeting) with the LRS Regional Manager.
- ◆ If the problem is still not resolved after the Administrative Review, request a **Fair Hearing**.

(NOTE: It is not required that an Administrative Review be conducted in order for you to request and receive a Fair Hearing. However, an Administrative Review can, in many situations, result in a faster solution of your problem.)



To request an **Administrative Review** or a **Fair Hearing**, you must:

- Request the appeal in writing to the LRS Regional Manager.
- Describe the decision or action you need to have resolved.
- Include your name, address, and telephone number.
- Sign and mail or deliver the request to the LRS Regional Manager.

The services outlined on the plan are conditioned on the approval and signatures of you, your VR counselor, the district supervisor and, if required, any other Agency approval(s), as well as availability of funds to LRS.

You and your VR counselor will review the IPE at least annually. If your situation changes, the IPE is revised accordingly.

STEP 6 – SERVICES

Vocational Rehabilitation Services are provided to help persons who are disabled prepare for, enter, and/or keep employment. You and your VR counselor determine the specific kind (s) and number of services you might need. Services are based on **your** individual needs; therefore, the types of services you receive may differ from services that other individuals receive. Not everyone requires the same or every service.

To achieve your employment goals, VR can provide a wide range of services:

- ◆ Medical examinations (general physical, psychological, or other specialist examinations).
- ◆ Vocational evaluation of interests, skills, and abilities for future work.
- ◆ Vocational Guidance.
- ◆ Career Counseling.
- ◆ Physical or mental restoration services that could include mental health counseling, speech therapy, physical therapy, etc.
- ◆ Training – universities, colleges, technical schools, apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training, supported employment, etc.
- ◆ Rehabilitation devices – medical equipment necessary for employment (wheelchairs, prosthesis, glasses, self-help devices, etc.)

- ◆ Rehabilitation engineering – assistance with job site modifications (changing lighting, adapting a telephone, a computer, or a tool, etc.); and training on the use of the modified equipment.
- ◆ Job Placement.
- ◆ Follow up after employment to ensure job success.

This is only a partial list of services. If you would like to know more about the services LRS offers, ask your VR counselor.

LRS always looks for the most cost-effective way to provide services without giving up quality. You and your VR counselor will look into other available resources that could assist in the cost effectiveness of your vocational rehabilitation program.

Please remember that LRS cannot pay for past bills, or for services and purchases that are not included on your IPE.

STEP 7 – EMPLOYMENT

All vocational rehabilitation services are planned to prepare you for a job. After successfully completing your planned services, you are ready for employment. Finding a job takes a lot of work, but together you and your VR counselor can match your skills with a job. You may discover that this is the most difficult part of the whole vocational rehabilitation process. **It is very important that you actively look for a job.**



CLIENT ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

You can request help from the Client Assistance Program (CAP) at any time to resolve problems or misunderstandings that occur during your vocational rehabilitation program. CAP is independent of LRS, and provides advocacy and information free of charge.

CAP has offices in both north and south Louisiana. The Shreveport office serves the area north of Alexandria, and the New Orleans office serves the area south of Alexandria.

In order to access services from the CAP, you must contact the office listed below:

**Advocacy Center
225 Baronne Street, Suite 2112
New Orleans, LA 70112-
(504) 522-2337 Voice and TDD**

Toll Free 1-800-960-7705
(Outside New Orleans)
E-mail: <http://www.advocacyla.org>

All services of CAP are confidential, free of charge, and provided without regard to race, creed, color, sex, age, national origin, or disability.



CONFIDENTIALITY

Your VR counselor will ask you to provide personal information about yourself to understand your disability, determine your eligibility, and plan your vocational rehabilitation program. A case record is developed to keep all your information together. **All case record information is confidential.**

LRS may share your information with certain individuals and/or agencies if they are also working with you.

LRS may provide your information to:

- ◆ Office of Mental Health.
- ◆ Office of Substance Abuse.
- ◆ Office of Family Support.
- ◆ Louisiana Department of Labor.
- ◆ Louisiana State Department of Education, Office of Special Education, and Office of Vocational Education.
- ◆ Social Security Administration.
- ◆ Office of Citizens with Developmental Disabilities.
- ◆ Louisiana Student Aid Association.
- ◆ Office of Community Services.
- ◆ Doctors, hospitals, clinics, & rehabilitation centers providing services to clients as authorized by LRS.
- ◆ U.S. Department of Labor.
- ◆ Schools and/or training centers when LRS has authorized the service.
- ◆ Department of Public Safety and Corrections.
- ◆ Colleges and universities.
- ◆ Parish school boards and educational officials responsible for providing secondary education.
- ◆ Military services of the U.S. Government.

LRS will not release your information to any other individual or agency without your informed consent. The only exception is to protect you or others if you are a threat to your own safety or the safety of others.

Your VR counselor and/or a job placement specialist will help you with your job search. They can help you:

- Complete application forms.
- Develop a resume.
- Prepare for an interview.
- Conduct your job search.
- Find job leads.

STEP 8 – SUCCESSFUL REHABILITATION

Once you are employed, your VR counselor will continue to work with you for an additional 90 days. During this 90 day period, your VR counselor will meet with you and, if you approve, your employer to determine your job satisfaction.



Sometimes, unforeseen problems can occur that put you at risk of losing your job. If this happens, contact your VR counselor immediately for assistance. Often, your counselor can help you work out the problem and/or provide services you might need to maintain your job.

If your case has been closed as successfully rehabilitated, but you need additional short-term services to help you maintain your current employment, you should ask your VR counselor about **post-employment services**.

Post-employment services are available to meet any simple, short-term rehabilitation need(s) you have after employment.

RESPONSIBILITIES

You are in charge of your vocational rehabilitation program; but it is also a “team” effort. To make your rehabilitation a success, you and your VR counselor must work together.

VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION WORKS BETTER IF YOU:

- ✓ Take an active part in planning and making decisions.
- ✓ Ask questions anytime you do not understand something.
- ✓ Stay in regular contact with the people working with you.
- ✓ Follow through with all the agreed upon activities.
- ✓ Keep your counselor advised of anything that changes your ability to complete your VR program.
- ✓ Ask your VR counselor for any help you need during any part of your VR program.
- ✓ Actively seek employment when you are job ready.
- ✓ Tell your VR counselor when you get a job.

YOU ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR MAKING SURE THAT THE REHABILITATION PLAN DEVELOPED BY YOU AND YOUR VR COUNSELOR MEETS YOUR NEEDS.



RIGHTS

You have certain rights under the Vocational Rehabilitation Program. It is important that you know and understand your rights. You have the right to:

- ✓ Apply for Vocational Rehabilitation Services.
- ✓ Be treated with respect.
- ✓ Be evaluated fairly and completely to have your eligibility determined.
- ✓ Receive a determination of eligibility within 60 days of application or agree to extend this period of time.
- ✓ Know why you are considered ineligible for services.
- ✓ Be referred to other agencies and facilities as appropriate.
- ✓ Appeal any decision or denial of service through either an administrative review and/or a fair hearing.
- ✓ Receive an explanation of the help available through the Client Assistance Program.
- ✓ Receive an assessment of your need for post-employment services.

